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REPLY

TO

THE AUTHOR OF THE LETTER

ON

SOUTH AMERICA AND MEXICO,

BY AN AMERICAN,

ADDRESSED TO

Mr. JAMES MUNROE,

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES,

Printed at Washington, in this present year, 1817.

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REPLY.

Philadelphia, Nov. 6th. 1817.

SIR,

As you suppress your name in your letter, and as the title page in the printed copy which is now in circulation, only bears the national epithet “ American,” I cannot address you in any other manner.

The concern you take in the cause of the people of South America and Mexico, in rebellion against the tyranny of the Spanish government, is certainly very laudable. Being well informed of the justice with which they aspire to independence and liberty, and of the importance of this event, you propose what ought to be the conduct of the government of these States, towards those which have been produced by the revolution of the Spanish colonies in the new world. I return you my thanks for your defence of the Columbians and their cause ; I, as one of them, and as one of the greatest admirers of their emancipation and liberty ought to set a high value upon every thing that is valuable in your letter. The whole of it would be so to me, if it did not disapprove of the revolution of one of the provinces of Brazil in America ; and if the course of conduct it proposes to the President of the United States were not so

mean. You will not be displeased at my expressing myself thus in a country in which shines the freedom of thought, reasoning, and the publishing of one's opinions, and when we are agreed on all the rest.

You are sorry that the revolution of Pernambuco should have been applauded in the news papers of the United States, confounding it with the struggle of the Patriots in the Spanish colonies, whose situation and cause were really different. Whatever may be the form of the Brazilian government, that part of South America has already obtained the object for which the other Americans are contending, "*to wit. a government within themselves.*" These are the words of your letter, adding that in the case of the Pernambucans, it was nothing but the revolt of an adjoining province.

This discourse of yours supposes that the right of resistance against despotism is given only to nations governed colonially, or by a power removed from their center: that is to say, however oppressed a people may be by a central or domestic government, it cannot take the alarm to escape from oppression. This is as much as to advance that societies have not the common right of rising against the arbitrary power of their rulers: therefore, if the case were to happen, that the executive authority of these United States should abuse the confidence placed in his hands, by attacking their constitutional principles, or prevailing upon their Congress, they could not turn against the ruler who should thus trample on their rights: they ought patiently to suffer this abuse of power, and be contented with having shaken off the European dependence since the year 1776.

In following the opinion of your letter with respect to Pernambuco, it would be necessary to tell the citizens who should rise against their despotic president, & seek the assistance of some other power, the same that you bring against the Pernambucans : “ *whatever may be your form of government, we can neither assist you, nor approve your insurrection, because you have already obtained the great object of the one which you undertook in 1774, to wit, an independence of the British government, and you have in your bosom an administration which was formerly in Europe.* ”

If such a proposition as this were advanced by one of those who call themselves politicians in the monarchy of Spain, or in any other equally despotic and absolute, I should not wonder at it ; but its being uttered in a country constituted in a free manner, and diametrically opposed to despotism, is, to me, very unexpected intelligence. Formerly it would also have been looked upon as a blasphemy in Spain, when the constitutions abolished by the Austrian kings were in full force. In that of Arragon, the right of resistance was sanctioned as one of its cardinal articles. In the English constitution this point is established from its most remote antiquity : but the sanction which the right of insurrection received from the British parliament is very remarkable, when, by this means, the reigning dynasty of G. Britain ascended the throne, to the exclusion of that of James the Second. I should never have done, were I to undertake to relate all the occasions in which the nations of the world have made use of this right against their internal administration : it is as ancient as society, or

despotism. Scarcely had this hydra raised its head ere those who were tyrannized also rose against it, using the common right of resistance, engraved on the heart of man by the Creator's own hand. Foreign conquests were yet unknown, and the colonial system of Europe was still very distant, when man, already united every where in society, had on numberless occasions made use of the right which you deny the Americans of Pernambuco, and in them, to every free and independent nation. This is nothing less than denying a power granted to all men by the Author of nature, according to the tradition of all ages, and the Holy Scriptures.

In all these places it is evident that resistance against the arbitrary power of a central and domestic administration is laudable; but, to resist a just and moderate government, is a crime deserving the censure which you unjustly let fall on the insurrection of Pernambuco. This Province has not conspired against an equitable and humane government, but against an arbitrary monarchy which neither acknowledges nor wishes to acknowledge any other constitution than the whims and caprices of a single person. And, where is the natural or divine precept which obliges a man to remain subject to the will and humour of a single individual? Do you not know, then, that to depend on the good will of a single person is what constitutes slavery? And what proofs can you produce to show that a people consisting of men, created according to God's image and likeness, should be obliged to enter into this slavery, or never to come out of it when they once suffered the yoke to be put on them, or found it fastened on their fathers?

It is impossible to give legitimate proofs against the sentiments of nature, the light of reason, and the testimony of the Holy Scriptures. It is unbecoming the high dignity of man to wish to subject himself to the absolute will of a person from whom he has not received his being. It is the same as confounding him with the cattle belonging to an individual, if this proprietor is to be able, on pretence of being a monarch, to dispose of the person and property of his subject, as he disposes of his beasts of burden, or of the quadrupeds shut up in a park. Such are, in your opinion, the natives of Pernambuco, when you want them to remain under the arbitrary power of the house of Braganza, since it is no longer in Lisbon, but at the court of Brazil. I am amazed, astonished and surprised to find the pen of an American politician bringing forth such a proposition as this.

It appears, that when you wrote your disapprobation of the proceeding of Pernambuco, you gave up the recollection of the annals of those nations, who have acted like this province against internal despotism. In your opinion, the Romans were criminal, who, led on by Julius Brutus, conspired against their king Tarquin the Proud, abolished his monarchy, and erected a republic in its stead: the Swiss who, being in a state of rebellion against the House of Austria, overturned its government, and constituted a democratical one: the English, who have so often made use of the common right of insurrection against their kings and internal government: the Portuguese, themselves,

revolutionized against the crown of Castile, which was on the same continent, and within the limits of the same peninsula. It would be a fine thing, indeed, that all these nations should be told: “ *Whatever may be your form of government, you cannot conspire against it, since it is within yourselves, or very near, on your own continent, washed by the same waters, and not separated by oceans or inaccessible mountains.*”

Such a government, as that of Brazil, is so repugnant to the will of God, that he highly disapproved of the conduct of the Israelites when they aspired through Samuel to an absolute monarchy. Such was the one they wanted; and its description is made with the utmost exactness in the very speech of the Prophet. That now existing in Rio Janeiro is a copy of it. God was not displeased with the Hebrews for wishing a king, but, that this king should be unconstitutional, and as arbitrary and despotic as the one in Brazil. Had they demanded such a king as is described in the seventeenth chapter of Deuteronomy, their petition would have been granted; because the one mentioned in this chapter was not absolute and capricious like that of the House of Braganza, but constitutional and moderate. And, if God is offended at the pretension of a monarchial and absolute government, can he be pleased that the Pernambucans and all Brazil should forever continue in subjection to the will of its actual arbitrary monarch? So then, because he removed from the Tagus to Rio Janeiro, are the Brazilians already bound forever to obey the will of this despot, in preference to the will of God?

According to this new political maxim, the sanguinary contest of the Americans of the Spanish colonies will be at an end, as soon as Ferdinand the seventh removes thither with all his train of tyranny, all his pomp of superstition, and his supreme council of inquisitors. Then the provinces of Spain will have a right to rise, because the focus of despotism has retired from them. As long as he resides in Madrid, Navarre, Galicia and Catalonia are unable to rise; and, therefore, the generals Mina, Porlier, and Lacy are criminals. All these are necessary consequences of the new system of politics announced by your letter, when it censures the conduct of Pernambuco. And, for the same reason, David was a criminal when he rose against Saul, and maintained himself at the head of a body of insurgents of six hundred men. By the same rule, you ought to condemn the ten tribes of Israel, who rebelled against Rehoboam, and founded another independent kingdom. They were liable to the same argument which you make use of to censure the proceeding of Pernambuco: an argument which should have made the Bostonians lay down their arms, if George the third had come to reside among them, although the British Parliament had insisted on depriving these legislatures of the right of imposing and fixing their contributions. In the event of removal of the government of London to these provinces, the complaint of the citizens would have been at an end, although the other causes of insurrection, mentioned in their declaration of independence, might have subsisted. Intent on decrying what has happened in this province, you also object that it is only a partial revolution. But do you forget, that this is the condition of almost all national tumults? The movement of all the parts of a nation is very seldom simultaneous. A single per-

son is the first who is wont to give the first cry of alarm against oppressive power ; a city, a department, or a village uses to be the first who raises the standard of insurrection. The remaining districts are accustomed to follow slowly, or with more or less celerity. But this renders not the person or party criminal who opened the way of the revolution. In the one which took place in these United States, Boston was the first to give the signal of alarm to all the rest, when its population was not equal to that of Pernambuco. And, had Boston been left to itself in its glorious enterprise, or had it been so unfortunate as to sink under it, would it therefore have been called criminal or unworthy of being assisted ?

All the revolted provinces would, perhaps, have returned to their former dependence, if they had not obtained the protection of France, Spain, and Holland. And would it, in such case, be said, that they were all of them criminal and unworthy of foreign assistance ? Should Washington and Franklin be placed on the list of malefactors, or on that of heroes ? I know that in the opinion of oppressors, the issue is what denominates such undertakings good or bad. But their judgment is neither impartial nor right. In the balance of justice, success is not what determines the goodness or wickedness of human actions : uprightness of intention, and the just or unjust motives of the actors, are the basis of impartial expression. He who rises against a just and well constituted government, will be a traitor : but he who takes the alarm against the arbitrary power of his country, or of his fellow creatures, will be a hero, a man of virtue and worthy of praise. If men, at the time they agreed to live in society, had executed a

compact of eternal toleration in favor of despotism, your proposition would, perhaps, appear tolerable; but, the contract of the members being the reverse, I know not whence you can bring arguments to maintain your opinion respecting Pernambuco. On the other hand, it is well known, that if even the first associates had agreed to such a compact, it would be unquestionably void. The rights of man are too sacred to be susceptible of a conventional degradation, such as is endeavored to be represented in your hypothesis. The contracting parties should be supposed mad; and, being unfit to stipulate and promise the spoliation of their natural dignity, all their engagements would be null. Many others are so which are performed by the stupid, the frantic, and children, although the matter of the contract be infinitely inferior to liberty, and the other imprescriptible rights which compose the great fund of society.

You cannot be ignorant that, in Brazil, there is no constitution, no representative government, nor law deserving this holy name. All the Brazilians are slaves, because they all depend on the will of an individual, which can never have any claim to the respectable character of a law. That which is properly called law, is the expression of the general will. The people of Pernambuco have no share in the formation of those acts which are honored by *Despotism* with the appellation of *Law*. In a word, the Brazilians are deprived of the exercise of their rights: the forced duty of blind obedience is the only right which, under this deceitful denomination is acknowledged in the provinces of Brazil, by their oppressor. And, yet, will you have it be a crime to undertake the reformation of this abuse, by

means of an insurrection....the only way to obtain it from a tyrant who considers as high treason the attempt of setting constitutional impediments to his arbitrary power?

When I see in your letter that, affecting not to notice the sovereignty of the people, you exclusively bestow this attribute on the house of Braganza, I am not astonished that you should also deny the Pernambucans, and all the Americans of Brazil, the common right of insurrection against their arbitrary government. Nothing of this will surprise any one who shall observe the new rule which you introduce to qualify revolutions as just or unjust. Until now, this innate principle in the hearts of all men, and of all nations, did not at all depend on the mathematics and other arts and sciences foreign to sound policy; but, in your letter, you subject it in such a manner to geography, as to make the value of distances be that which is to decide with precision on the value or nullity of insurrectional movements, of their justice and injustice. And, although experience shows that the weight of tyranny is oftentimes heavier and more painful to those who live in its center, than to those on the circumference; to the subjects nearer the tyrant than to those who are more distant; the maxim invented by you should, notwithstanding, remain unalterable when the question is about the liberty of Brazil, or the one million and one hundred thousand souls which inhabit the province of Pernambuco. I read in the great book of nature, in the practice of all nations, and in the Holy Scriptures, the duty of saving from their anguish and danger those who are led to death, or suffer unjustly. I see that this duty is more obligatory among persons

of the same family, of the same community, people, or nation. I find, in many places, the urgency of this duty in those persons who, by their valor and other virtues, are more fit for the purpose. In the same manner as they have received more gifts from nature, they have also received from her the especial precept of employing them for the benefit of their oppressed fellow creatures, though at the risk of life.

If this obligation, then, has been imposed on every one, will it be lessened by the bonds of society? You yourself confess, and with reason, that as man was not created to live by himself in solitude, so nations were not formed to exist in a solitary state. We are not born for ourselves only, but to support, serve, and mutually help each other. By the social contract, this duty, far from being relaxed, is more concluding and strait. Why then disapprove the completion of it in the patriots of Pernambuco? and why deny other powerful nations the right or obligation of protecting them?

What would have been the issue of the glorious undertaking of these illustrious citizens, if, by such arguments as those contained in your letter, France, Spain and Holland had abstained from affording them their protection? Would you wish that I had then addressed to the governments of those nations a discourse proportionate to the one made by you to the President against the revolution of Pernambuco? The natural precept of wishing and not wishing to others, what we wish or wish not for ourselves, binds each and every individual of our species. And, how do you apply it in the cause of Pernambuco? Will you be able to say with any evidence, that the Pernambucans, or the Americans of all the provinces of Brazil conducted

themselves towards these United States in their revolution, as the king of Portugal? Are you, by chance, ignorant, that this despot shut his ports against their commerce and accused them of being rebels, traitors, and criminals? Why then so great a regard for him in your letter, and none at all for those patriots who subscribed not to the sentiments of the court of Lisbon at that time, and who, on the 6th March, 1817, thought themselves very honorable in imitating the Bostonians of 1774?

Aurajo You confess, in your letter, that, during the late war, the house of Braganza, by the nature of its relations with England, *leaned rather to the side of our enemy*; and, do you believe, that this inclination, and its former conduct in the war for independence are purged away by its having, through the influence of its minister Aurajo, named as Ambassador near the government of the United States, a Person, *who had made this country his choice, who was on terms of friendship with many of our most distinguished fellow citizens, who was supposed to be too much a republican for Europe?* I should rather believe, that since the *Aurajo* Chevalier Aurajo had caused the appointment to fall on an Abbé who is a republican by principle, and unjustly persecuted by the inquisition, he would not be displeased with the proceeding at Pernambuco. I should have considered that minister as possessing no small share of republicanism when I read the treaty which, in the name of Portugal, he executed with the Executive Directory of the French Republic, on the 10th August, 1797. But, I do not believe the tyrant of Brazil to be purified, but by means of the course undertaken in the province of Pernambuco, and the aid which it claims from these United States.

You admit the right in the remaining powers to co-operate with any other one in repressing its rebellious subjects. I suppose you speak in the case of an unjust rebellion; because, if it be a just one, co-operating against the insurgents will not be a right nor a duty, but an excess of injustice. In this sense, you must confess, that if a nation may, or ought to help another in the subjugation and chastisement of a people unjustly rebelled, the duty of protecting them in a just insurrection is correlative. For want of this help, the best citizens of Pernambuco have perished in the heroic enterprise of liberating their fellow citizens from slavery: the cause of the freedom of Brazil has retrograded, and its oppressor, by loading himself with new crimes, is become more infamous and unworthy of reigning among the Pernambucans: consequently, these are more deserving of the attention and succors which the justice of their cause demands.

The atrocities committed by that monster in St. Salvador and Pernambuco are notorious. His hands have been stained with the innocent blood of those persons who undertook the freedom of their fellow creatures.

This tyrant has not shed as much blood as the Spaniards have, in the war against the Americans of the colonies belonging to Spain: but his conduct, compared to that of Ferdinand VII is, without a doubt, more execrable and cruel, by reason of the inhuman and barbarous manner in which many Patriots of Pernambuco have been executed. But, notwithstanding all the blood that has been, and is actually shed by the executioners of the Spanish government in South America and Mexico, you do not yet condescend to incline to

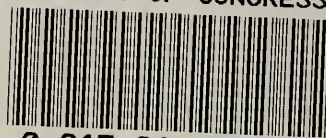
assistance which the patriots are imploring since the year 1810. You content yourself with official relations of friendship and commerce; an excellent measure, if it could prevent the copious effusion of blood which is taking place in America, or fixing forever its emancipation. The war carried on by the Spaniards in the revolted colonies is a hellish one. They have taught it to the Americans, who retaliate on them in the same way. And, have the other nations neither rights nor duties to check and remedy this disorder?

Any individual is authorised to disarm a madman, and deprive him of the instruments with which he sheds the blood of the innocent: and, is it a duty unknown, in the assembly of many individuals, to bring over to reason a frantic king who, without any reason whatever, is committing a horrible butchery on so many worthy American patriots who, without offending any one, claim those rights which are acknowledged by all nations? And, if this claim is just, and resistance against the arbitrary power of Spain is just, why abstain from helping the innocent, or disarming the frantic offender who unjustly and barbarously persecutes them? Why not save them from their anguish and danger? Why tolerate any longer or consider with indifference a war of death and extermination?

So then, for the freedom of the seas, although the want of it deprives no one of life, shall it be lawful to go to war? And, shall it not be lawful, in order to prevent a greater effusion of innocent blood by a fanatic government to arm against it, and break one's neutrality? To hinder the plan or duration of the continental system of Europe all the other powers of the continent are to arm themselves against the author of it: and, to repress the sanguinary tyrant who intends to unpeople and enchain anew, a continent larger than that of Europe. shall there not be even one nation to take up arms against him, or furnish them to the defenders of its liberty? I cannot reconcile this inconsistency to the eternal principles of justice, philosophy, and reason: and, if this inconsequence is called policy, I renounce it forever, and abstain from lengthening this reply.

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